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## Viewing cable 07SANJOSE1768, COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA: UNEASTY NEIGHBORS

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">07SANJOSE1768</a>	<a href="#">2007-09-24 22:38</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy San Jose</a>

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-07/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2704388.aspx>  
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P 242238Z SEP 07  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8935  
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RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO PRIORITY 1560  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0758

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 001768

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2017  
TAGS: [CS](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [XK](#)  
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA: UNEASTY NEIGHBORS

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Costa Rican-Nicaraguan relations remain strained from a GOCR perspective. This was only slightly improved by Presidents Arias and Ortega meeting in Managua on August 21, although Arias reportedly returned with a written commitment from Ortega to support Costa Rica's UNSC election in October. Ortega's ties to Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and his interest in poaching business from Costa Rica should CAFTA not be ratified here have not helped. The long-standing Rio San Juan dispute and concerns about Nicaraguan immigration also color GOCR thinking. As long as the two historic contenders remain in office, bilateral relations will remain cool and correct at best, but the GOCR will continue working to keep relations as "normal" as possible. END SUMMARY.

OLD CONCERNS; OLD RIVALS  
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¶2. (SBU) Two familiar and long-standing reasons continue to cloud Costa Rican-Nicaraguan relations. One is the Rio San Juan controversy, which is now in the hands of the International Court of Justice. The other is the continued migration to Costa Rica of Nicaraguans, which may number as many as 500,000, nearly half probably illegal. Costa Ricans also continue to blame Nicaraguan immigrants (unjustly) for the rise in the rate of violent crime and insist that Nicaraguans take jobs from Costa Ricans.

¶3. (C) Added to these ingredients is the chilly personal relationship between the two presidents. As Antonio Alarcon, FM Stagno's COS describes it, the two leaders are simply "carrying too much historical baggage" for bilateral ties to improve much, as long as they are both in office. Sergio Ugalde and Arnold Brenes, the MFA's veterans Nicaragua watchers, claim that Ortega still resents Arias for taking all the credit for the Esquipulas peace accords in 1986 and for contributing to Ortega's electoral defeat in 1990.

¶4. (C) According to Alarcon, Arias believes he has made his mark in Central America, so his current foreign policy focus is broader, more global. The president is therefore not giving as much attention to immediate regional issues. The one exception is Panama, a neighbor "carrying less baggage" and therefore more receptive to improved relations with Costa Rica. "Things are done differently there," Alarcon said (i.e., easier than with Nicaragua). He indicated improved ties with Panama would remain an Arias administration priority.

NEW WORRIES  
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¶5. (C) Alarcon recalls that Ortega had considerable public support within Costa Rica in the 1980's. Any vestige of that support today is being eroded by concerns that Ortega is deliberately courting businesses to leave Costa Rica should CAFTA not be ratified here. (COMMENT: Although we have seen no signs of active Gov't recruitment in Costa Rica, we continue to hear anecdotal information from investors and business people confirming this. END COMMENT.) Ortega's "unpredictability," supporting CAFTA one day and ALBA the next, plus his "parroting" of Hugo Chavez, words and policies, also trouble Costa Ricans in and out of government, according to Alarcon. Ugalde and Brenes agree, adding that Nicaragua's opening with Iran, continued close ties to Cuba, and potential interest in re-arming and further militarizing worry the GOCR.

MEETING IN MANAGUA: LET'S GET IT OVER WITH  
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¶6. (C) When finally Arias and Ortega met in Managua on August 21st, Arias's visit to Managua in August, arranged by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Esquipulas accords, was thus in a "let's

get this over with" vein, Alarcon said. The GOCR had reached out several times before to schedule a summit, other MFA sources told us, but all turned into a kabuki dance of cancellations or "indefinite" postponements. Despite cabinet-level visits, including by FM Stagno June 14-15 to inaugurate the Costa Rica consulate in Rivas, and subsequent visits at the end of June by MFA Nicaraguan desk personnel, the GOCR made little progress in getting the two leaders together. Then, Ortega snubbed Arias by declining to attend the Esquipulas commemoration in San Jose on August 7.

¶7. (C) Arias expected some sort of Ortega "show," and gritted his teeth to put up with it, Alarcon told us. (In this case it was Ortega announcing only the day before that he would meet privately with Arias, then picking him up at the airport and driving him in his own vehicle to their meeting venue.) Arias's public remarks were deliberately flowery, in an effort to reach out to the Nicaraguan people.

#### ONE TAKEAWAY: PLEDGE OF UNSC ELECTION SUPPORT =====

¶8. (C) Little came from the August 21 meeting, nor did the GOCR expect much, according to Alarcon. The binational commission will resume meeting, and Ortega is supposed to make a reciprocal visit to Costa Rica sometime between November 2007 and January 2008. The commission meetings are to resume with a session in Managua in the second quarter of 2008, with immigration, border development and Central American integration on the agenda. The MFA reports, however, that Ortega did provide Arias a written (and not-publicized) commitment of Nicaraguan support for Costa Rica's UNSC election in October.

#### A LOCAL NICARAGUAN VIEW =====

¶9. (C) Nicaraguan Ambassador Harold Rivas confirmed to us that the Binational Commission will resume late this year or early in 2008, and that Ortega is to participate. Rivas cautioned that this does not signal the dawning of improved bilateral relations, but it does underscore a willingness to begin to work towards improvement. Looking ahead, Rivas pointed to gradually increasing Nicaraguan migration to El Salvador (because of CAFTA-fueled growth) and Panama (because of the new canal construction) in pursuit of better paying jobs. If this trend continues, migration to Costa Rica and all its attendant problems might be eased, and relations improved, he predicted.

#### COMMENT =====

¶10. (C) The GOCR seems to be maintaining low expectations for relations with Nicaragua. Historical and personal entanglements, primarily those between Ortega and Arias, will continue to complicate the picture. Personal relations between the two old rivals are unlikely to be warm, especially as they both seek to adjust to a region that has changed significantly since their heyday in the 1980's. Their initial meeting may have opened the way for some thawing in official relations between the two countries, but we expect relations overall to remain cool and correct.

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